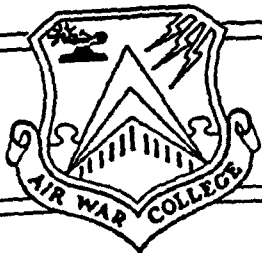


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# AIR WAR COLLEGE

## Research Report

RETHINKING STRATEGY

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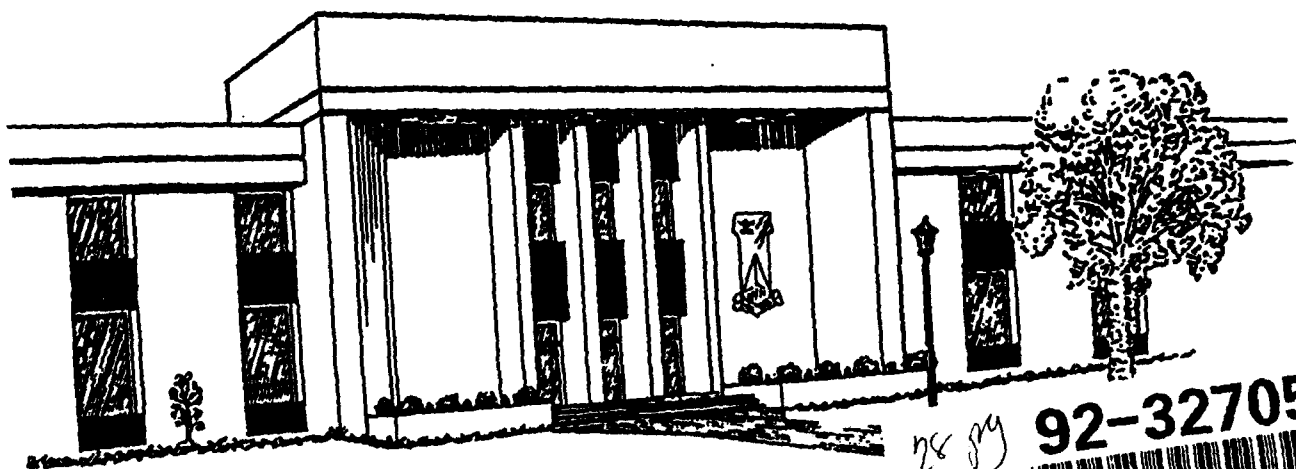


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AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

RETHINKING STRATEGY

BY

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

Advisor: Dr. M. E. Ahrani

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

April 1992

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## RETHINKING STRATEGY

### Introduction

In the post Cold War period, the US is faced with rethinking its entire foreign policy. What does the US do about emerging democracies in East Europe, about the instability of the CIS, about economic competition from the EC and Japan or the Saddam Husseins of the world? Additionally, with the ballooning US national debt, the US has to conserve its resources and restrict the issues it deals with. Every region presents a challenge and some issues will have to be abandoned to others. To deal with the complexity, the US needs a comprehensive grand strategy supported by complimentary regional strategies.

Developing new strategies is difficult. Americans are independent thinkers and act out of agreement with policy more than strict adherence to policy. Therefore, US strategy must be based on a well understood consensus. American consensus has historically been based on a commonly perceived threat. US history rings with phrases that have rallied Americans: the Maine, Pearl Harbor and communist aggression. Without a threat, the common consensus has given way to fragmented individual interest. (23:42,46)

Without the Soviet threat, US policy does not seem to have a clear purpose. Political scientists believe the US needs a new grand strategy to "anchor" the nation's efforts in world affairs. (1:-) However, in the post cold

war world, can US leadership build a consensus among Americans for continued international involvement? If so, what grand strategy will capture the consensus in America and what regional strategies support US grand strategy?

#### Searching for a Consensus

American's desires are simple: peace and prosperity. (21:1) Unfortunately for US policy makers, Americans resent the existence of foreign policy (22:433) and historically, "American foreign policy is to have no foreign policy." (21:1) Americans prefer to concentrate on domestic issues and are only concerned with foreign or military matters when their daily lives are seriously affected. (23:42,46) In an increasing interdependent world, international relations are essential to US domestic concerns but Americans have little interest in foreign affairs and quickly become impatient with "time consuming complexity." (23:53,54)

World War Two thrust the US into a position of world leadership. The US ended the war as one of the two world military superpowers and the dominant economic power producing nearly half of the world's GNP. (26:-) Additionally, the Soviet threat at the inter-German border provided the political focus to spur the US to action. Historians suggest that the US strategy of containment developed to deal with the Soviet threat was the US's first national strategy for world involvement and represented a

change in traditional US behavior. (24:366)

Consensus could be based on national interest, but Americans reject national interest and balance of power thinking and substitute moralistic phrases. (25:91) For instance, the US goes "to war in the name of moral principles...and only in righteous indignation or outrage" vice deliberate self interest. (25:90;21:6) However, a perceived threat has united the nation.

US national consensus can best be built on countering a commonly understood threat. During the 40 years of cold war, communist aggression provided the US a common threat. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, several US policy makers are quick to conclude that the threat is gone. These officials are most often referring to the military threat and argue for defense cuts based on the demise of the Soviets. These arguments generally do not propose a new national strategy but rather are a fragmented part of the policy debate. They propose action (cutting defense spending) without a strategy framework and reflect the US historical tendency not to have a national strategy except in response to a direct military threat. (24:xix)

The threats to US peace and prosperity can be more than just a military threat. Ask any American what dangers the US faces today and you will get answers: drugs, the economy, the Japanese, racial unrest from the Rodney King trial, and jobs. Most are domestic concerns which

frustrate US officials responsible for international affairs. However, to build a consensus, policy must propose solutions to commonly perceived problems.

#### US Grand Strategy

The US grand strategy of containment has been replaced with the US leadership's vision for a New World Order. Under containment, the US's objective was to check Soviet expansion. Now in the New World Order, the US goal is "to build a new international system in accordance with our own (US) values and ideals." Additionally, the concept envisions an international consensus that disputes not be settled by force. (28:v,1)

The New World Order envisions a coalition of powers cooperating to maintain order. Such coalitions existed following the Napoleonic Wars and World War I. Past coalitions were based on the prevention of war through cooperation (just as the New World Order is); however, the coalitions failed and gave way to competition based on national interests. Rosecrance in a recent article in Foreign Affairs is hopeful that the current coalition will survive but history suggests the coalition will dissolve into competing powers. The Rosecrance article suggests the world is evolving from a period of nuclear deterrence, through a period of coalition and into a period of competing powers. (33:-)

To a degree, the New World Order is a return to

traditional US beliefs. Historians note that since peace and prosperity has been good for America, Americans believe its values and ideals are good for the world also. (29:39) Additionally, the US has had an excessive faith in legislation. Marshall writes in his 1954 book, The Limits of Foreign Policy, the US believes "an aim legislatively expressed is achievable." (29:19) This concept underlies the US leadership's belief that there can be a world consensus against armed conflict which can carry the force of law.

Unfortunately, US traditional beliefs have not served the nation well in foreign policy. In his book, Ideals and Self-Interest in American Foreign Relations, Osgood writes, "Americans overestimated the role of ideals and underestimated the role of national power and self-interest." Additionally, "Americans were largely ignorant of the actual ends and motives of nations" and finally, Osgood notes American expectation of diplomacy exceeds the bounds of real possibilities. (22:10)

In the Middle East, the US objective of exporting US values quickly runs afoul. The communal nature of the Islamic culture is fundamentally opposed to the US values of personal advancement and individual freedoms overriding the needs of the whole. Additionally, the US pushes its democratic model as the only proper form of government to achieve rule based on the consent of the governed. Islamic

culture is in conflict with US values. Islamic governments derive their legitimacy from the Koran's concept of communal government not America's concept of individual freedoms. Washington's assertion of US values is offensive to Islamic nations and counterproductive in foreign affairs. (1:-)

The US belief in the power of its ideology to contribute to its security is a hold over from the Cold War. During the Cold War, the US and its democratic allies squared off against the Soviets and its communist hoards. The war was for ideals and a struggle for influence. The communists looked for weaknesses to exploit and the forces of democracy and capitalism sought development and prosperity to deny communist foot holds. With the war of ideology ended, the US should reduce its ideological rhetoric. The challenge is now from others having the same ideology, such as Germany or Japan, and exporting US ideology no longer enhances US security.

A US grand strategy based on self-interest and national power is better suited for the future than the idealist vision of a New World Order. In the future, the US's best guarantee of security will be its economic, political and military strength not democratic governments and free market institutions in other nations. Instead of creating nations like itself, the US must now brace for competition with nations like itself. The future threat to the US is international competition.

### National Security Objectives

The US must have clear objectives. Objectives provide focus for effort and efficiency in using resources. As other nations approach equaling the wealth of America, Americans can't waste their resources and expect to outperform their competitors. The Bush administration eludes to this in the national security strategy which states, "Our national power...ultimately rests on...our economy, and our security would be badly served if we allowed fiscal irresponsibility at home to erode our ability to protect our interests abroad." (28:2) However, the US administration's national security strategy should also state that US interests would also be poorly served by wasting resources abroad.

The current US national security objectives can contribute to US competitiveness if grand strategy is updated. The US national security objectives are survival of the nation, a healthy economy, cooperative relations with allies and a stable and secure world. The US must achieve all objectives to ensure competitiveness; however, the New World Order suggests the outcome of achieving national objectives is an international system with US values and ideals where force can not be used to settle disputes. In the New World Order, is the US strong or weak? The concept provides no vision of either. The US grand strategy should envision US strength. (28:v,3,4)

The US should use the present period of international cooperation and coalition to prepare for future competition by following the national security goals listed below (31:-):

1. Sustain global stability through "responsibility sharing" which will permit the US to concentrate its resources on strengthening the domestic national security foundation in preparation for the next century.
2. Maintain US global influence and access in support of political security and economic interests at minimum levels of investment in military forces.
3. Maintain the capability for prompt and decisive action to deter conflict in crisis situations and to protect US interests and citizens.
4. Discourage the emergence of a rival major military bloc or power that could potentially generate another global challenge.
5. Rebuild the domestic foundations of national power--infrastructure, social fabric, economic strength and education.

### Regional Strategy

At the regional level, the US must refine its objectives to conserve resources. The New World Order as a grand strategy does not provide the focus needed for efficient regional strategy. The concept is too broad. One author maintains the New World Order is nothing more than containment applied on a global scale. (32:56) Trying to contain all global conflict would exhaust any nation. The US needs a grand strategy that guides the formation of clear and achievable US regional objectives. As suggested earlier in this paper, the US strategy should be to build national power to prepare for future competition. Regional strategy should contribute to US power by helping build markets and political influence and conserve US resources.

The Middle East is a good region to use to evaluate US regional strategy. Middle East oil is vital to the US and even during a period of US history in which the concerns of the nation are centering on domestic affairs, Americans still understand the importance of maintaining access to oil. The Middle East was an area of superpower contest during the cold war and America now needs to rethink its relationships in the region. Finally, the lingering regional conflicts and political complexities in the Middle East will severely challenge US wisdom and resolve.

### The Middle East, an Overview

The Middle East is one of the few regions of the world which could spawn global war. The area contains two thirds of the worlds known oil supplies and when the US's oil reserves are depleted, the Middle East will still have 100 years of supply. (19:-) Interrupting the Middle East oil flow would threaten all developed nations and could drag the world into war.

The probability of war in the Middle East is heightened by the region's long history of conflict. The Middle East is the birth place of three great religions, which for centuries have struggled for dominance. Additionally, the region has been a center of conquest for 2500 years. The Middle East is the land bridge between three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia, and has been used as an invasion route for Alexander the Great, the Persians, Romans and Ottomans, just to name a few. (20:-) Most recently, the region was dominated by Europe and only since World War Two, have nations of the region been independent. With only forty years experience of self government after 2500 years of domination, nations of the region have understandably struggled.

Historically, US ties to the Middle East have centered on Israel and moderate Arab governments, and US policies have been purposefully vague to enhance the

appearance of impartiality between the Arabs and Israel.

(1:-) The objectives of US policy have been to encourage moderating forces in the region and provide bases of US operations should intervention be necessary.

The cornerstone of US relations with moderate Arab governments is its relations with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the Washington's largest trading partner in the Middle East and interfaces with the US through the Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation which was established in 1974. (3:1097) Additionally, since the Gulf War, Washington and Riyadh have agreed to conduct joint military exercises. (14:452) Saudi Arabia is the major force behind the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional economic and security alliance between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. (1:-)

Since World War Two, containment has tinted US Middle East policy. The US developed plans to stop the Soviets from pushing south to capture Middle East oil fields and warm water ports (19:-) and played in Middle East politics to block Soviet influence in the region. The Middle East superpower contest was graphically displayed during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War in which the Soviets backed the Egyptians and the US supported Israel. (27:102,103) Now the Soviet Union is dissolved and containment no longer applies.

Current US national strategy contains six Middle

East objectives: stability and security of friendly nations, free flow of oil, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, reduction of destabilizing conventional arms sales, countering terrorism, and an Arab-Israeli peace process consonant with the US commitment to Israel's security. Additionally, the US military strategy in the Middle East is to maintain a continuing presence consistent with the desires and needs of friends, to have no permanent ground presence, and to bolster allies through exercises, prepositioning and an enhanced naval presence. (28:10,28)

Peace is the key objective and influence is the preferred tool. However, the US concerns with shaping internal affairs of Middle East governments as part of exporting US values could hinder US efforts in the region. Reshaping Middle East nations requires the influence to change internal affairs. However, serious policy debates rage on whether any nation has the ability to influence change in the Middle East. (5:7) Additionally, host nation support is critical. Will Arab governments accept the US in the region? The region's colonial background makes Arab rulers wary of permanent western presence.

### Sources of Middle East Conflicts

Middle East conflict is the biggest challenge to US policy. The US objective in the region is to maintain peace so the world has access to Middle East oil, US firms have access to Middle East markets and Israel's survival is assured. Regional conflict could threaten all US objectives so US's Middle East strategy must center on minimizing Middle East conflict. Major sources of Middle East conflict are summarized below.

#### 1. Israel.

The greatest threat to Middle East peace may be the nation of Israel. In years past, the US considered the Arab-Israeli conflict a major threat to peace. However, the threat may now be Israeli aggression. Israel has grown into the superpower in the Middle East. Though small in size, Israel is an established nuclear power and as such has the capability to simultaneously defeat all its Arab neighbors. (16:319) Additionally, Israel's conventional force is unsurpassed in the region. Israel is quick to point out that it is vastly out numbered but as the Gulf War graphically displayed, superior technology is more than a match for superior numbers.

Combining Israel's superior military force with the nation's holocaust mentality creates a dangerous mix. Following the Jewish holocaust of World War II, the Arabs in 1947 attacked the young nation of Israel with the intent of

exterminating the Jews in the Middle East. The Jews fought savagely to survive through three wars until they emerged the superior military power in the region. Now in the name of survival and security, Israel feels justified by its past to take whatever steps it deems necessary to protect itself. In doing so, Israel is now often violating the rights of its neighbors and its own Arab citizens. Israel's invasion and occupation of Lebanon in 1982 and repeated incursions into Lebanon are examples. Additionally, Israel still occupies territory captured in the 1967 war despite United Nations resolution to the contrary. Finally, Israeli oppression in the occupied territories raises serious questions of human rights violations. Does the US support Israel's actions? The US may say "No." However, Arab nations point to US aid to Israel as proof to the contrary. This weakens US influence with Arab nations.

Israel's strength appears to be making them increasingly independent and harder for the US to influence. When the US recently tried to pressure Israel into stopping settlements in the occupied territories in return for 10 billion dollars in loan guarantees, Israel refused and determined to go elsewhere for help. US television aired Israeli citizen reactions to the loan guarantee issues. The citizens characteristically cited the holocaust and stated, "Never again". (17:-) Israel's holocaust phobia and superior military power could increasingly limit US

influence with Israel.

## 2. Oil.

Conflicts within the Middle East region are the most likely threats to interrupting the flow of oil; however, the US must not totally discount external intervention motivated by oil. The economies of the US, Europe and the Pacific are increasingly dependent on Persian Gulf oil. In 1989, the US imported 47 percent of its oil which was a five percent increase from 1988. Also, 25 percent of US imported oil was from the Persian Gulf. Additionally, Gulf oil was 29 percent of Europe's supply and 63 percent of Japan's oil. Finally, the Persian Gulf contains two thirds of the free world's proven oil reserves. (1:-) Every nation that imports Middle East oil has a vital interest in the region and in desperation could feel forced to use armed action to protect their interests. Though the people of the US may consider external intervention out of the question, history suggests that the instant any nation believes the action would succeed there is danger of it occurring.

## 3. Water.

The Middle East is an arid region and water is a major issue. Only 11 percent of Middle East land can be farmed and 25 percent of farmable land must be irrigated. This compares with 20 percent of US land with 10 percent irrigated. Turkey is the only nation in the region which receives over 40 inches of rainfall a year and is currently

conducting damn building projects that will double Turkey's farmable land and allow Turkey to sell water to other nations. Water is also a factor in the Arab-Israeli dispute. The contested west bank of the Jordan River provides 25 percent of the water to the aquifer from which Israel draws its water. (1:-)

#### 4. Authoritarian Nature of Arab governments.

The Islamic culture tends toward authoritarian rule which presents major problems in political succession. Arab authoritarian government can be in the form of a monarchy or republican government and there is an underlying conflict between the two forms similar to the conflict in the 1800's between revolutionary France and the monarchies of Europe. The stability of the authoritarian governments is often made more precarious by minority factions controlling the government. These factions sometimes use very repressive measures to ensure their control which contributes to the unstable environment for political succession. Additionally, when the US supports an existing Middle East government, it is supporting a government which is suppressing some portion of its population. This situation brings the US squarely face to face with the issue of dealing with underlying problems or just trying to keep the peace between nations despite the problems. (1:-)

## 5. Religious Conflicts.

Arab nations are also divided along religious lines. A conflict among early rulers of Islam concerning political session developed into two Islamic sects: Shiite and Sunni. Current Shiite fundamentalism such as in Iran is a threat to Sunni governments, and moderate Arab governments formed the Gulf Cooperation Council in the early 1980s as defense against the fundamentalists. (1:-)

## 6. Haves and Have Nots.

Because of the distribution of oil wealth, the Arab nations are divided between have and have-not nations. The skewed distribution produces jealousy and conflict and the fundamentalist's belief that oil is an Arab asset and not a national asset adds to the conflict. (1:-)

## 7. Border Disputes.

The border disputes grow out of the period of European colonialism. The Europeans divided the area among themselves and many of the dividing lines did not agree with traditional boundaries. The European boundaries also created minorities within nations who are still struggling for their own independence. These minorities include the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey and the Shiites in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Additionally, some oil fields are involved in border disputes. (1:-)

## 8. Economic Pressure.

Some Middle East nations could fall due to economic pressure. Cities dominate the economies of the Middle East. The cities are located along the few waterways and due to rapid population growth and migration are overcrowded. Oil provides the major source of wealth to the region and industry is mostly on a small scale. There have been recent increases in light consumer industry in Egypt, Turkey, Israel and Iran but most heavy capital goods are still imported. Agricultural production per unit of area is an eighth to a fourth of western production. Irrigated land is becoming salinated and as a result one percent of the farmable irrigated land is abandoned each year. Additionally, the soil temperature can run 130 to 180 degrees which prevents the use of chemical fertilizers and locusts can destroy up to 60 percent of the crop each year. The US has economic options to help. The US could offer membership in the Generalized System of Preferences which allows poor countries to sell in the US with reduced tariffs, access to US financial markets, commercial investments and most favored-nation status. (11:51-52) Also, the US could sponsor Middle East nations with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. (1:-)

## 9. Arms Proliferation.

Arms escalation has resulted from the threat of regional conflict and has been fueled by oil wealth and US-Soviet competition. In the Middle East, there is great distrust between neighbors which is intensified by the numerous sources of conflict in the area. Distrust has led to a feeling of insecurity which in turn has led to a desire to arm. Oil wealth has allowed several nations to buy advanced weapons. Other nations, such as Israel and Syria, were supplied weapons by the US or the Soviets in their effort to establish influence in the area. The elimination of US-Soviet competition will reduce one source of weapons but not the demand. (1:-)

Security assistance could provide the US the ability to maintain a regional balance of power and exert influence in the region. Supplying a US system with a 20 year life cycle means 20 years of influence in that country. Under the policy of cautious diplomacy, the US would concentrate on supplying nations the material to deal with their own problems. The policy would recognize the need for economic and military strength to sustain stability. Middle East writers site the Kurds as an example of what happens to a group of people in the Middle East who can't defend themselves. (4:28)

Weapons of mass destruction combined with long range delivery systems pose an ever increasing threat in the

Middle East. Israel is recognized as a nuclear power though the nation does not admit having nuclear weapons. Iraq, Syria and Libya have nuclear programs at various stages of development. (1:-) The weapons are destabilizing. Israel envisions a Syrian attack being led by missile attacks on Israeli airfields and populations. The attacks would hinder Israeli mobilization and initial air defense. (4:29) Given the short warning time (Tel Aviv to the Jordan River is only 45 miles), Israel must feel a great need for deterrent retaliatory capability. Additionally, with so many Arab nations still in a declared state of war with Israel, is it realistic to ask Israel to disarm?

The US policy debate on nuclear weapons most often centers on keeping Iran, Iraq or Libya from having nuclear weapons, but the largest hurdle to eliminating nuclear weapons in the Middle East is Israel. Israel officially favors a nuclear free zone in the Middle East (18:-) but this author believes their position is really intended to keep other Middle East nations from developing a nuclear arsenal. It is hard to even image a scenario where the US could convince Israel to give up its nuclear weapons and if Israel can have nuclear, why can't the Arab countries have them also?

#### 10. Islamic Fundamentalism.

Islamic fundamentalism uses Islamic terms but its message is based on social, political and economic conditions. (9:194) Fundamentalists preach that social ills can be cured by replacing the corrupt ruling elite with Islamic leadership. (9:198) The oppressive nature of Arab authorization governments is part of the problem. (11:37) The fundamentalists use discontent with existing governments much the same as the communists did; however, like communism, the fundamentalist's promise is only a pipe dream. Fundamentalism will not solve the area's problems and is disruptive because of its definite anti-western and anti-Israeli stance. (9:199) The movement is anti-western in nature due to the colonial heritage of the region (9:197) and the West's inability "to respond to third world needs after two decades of dialogue." (9:200) The best US response would seem to be keeping external aggression at bay and encouraging nation building. (11:37)

### Conclusion

The US can not correct all Middle East problems and should not attempt to do so. What can the US do about water shortages, the distribution of wealth or overpopulation?

(1:-) More importantly, what US interest is served by addressing such problems? Washington liberals preach a moral obligation to improve the condition of man but the US government deficit is too large and domestic needs too pressing to spend US resources on anything but vital interests.

Vital US interests in the Middle East are maintaining access to oil and regional economic markets. Regional conflict is the biggest threat to continued access. To deter conflict, the US should stay engaged with the oil producing states and pursue a peacetime objective of access and influence. (34:-) The US should strengthen friendly nations through arms sales, military assistance and joint military exercises but minimize the peacetime commitment of US military forces. Additionally, the US should foster a regional coalition based on Saudi Arabia to help counter regional threats. However, the US will have to remain the ultimate guarantor of regional security.

US regional and grand strategy should rest squarely on a balance of power concept. US allies should be strong and US enemies weak. The New World Order's rule of law is inappropriate. Under the rule of law concept, every nation

has an equal right to act in its own best interest including arming itself. It is not in the best interest of the US for nations like Iran, Iraq or Libya to arm under the protection of this concept. The US must limit their power while strengthening the power of moderate forces in the region.

Israel is no longer a vital US interest in the Middle East. During the cold war, Israel was important as a counterweight to Soviet supported Arab states but in the post cold war period, Israel is more of a threat to regional peace than a US asset. The strong US Jewish lobby in America will influence US domestic politics concerning Israel but the US must work toward reducing its commitment to Israel. Ultimate US interests rest with the Arab world and the US must not let the Jewish lobby hinder national interests.

America's future threat is increased international competition. The current US led coalition will not last and the US must adopt a grand strategy which will strengthen it for the period ahead when the coalition becomes a group of competing powers. In 1913, Winston Churchill was quoted as saying that the usefulness of war had ended and a period of international justice had begun. (34:-) It had not then nor has it now. The New World Order is a dream. US strategy must prepare the nation for reality.

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